

Serving Zero Alcohol Drinks to Minors

What are “zero alcohol” drinks?

You may see products like:

- Zero alcohol beer
- Alcohol-free wine or sparkling wine
- Non-alcoholic spirits (for example, alcohol-free gin alternatives)

Even though these drinks contain little or no alcohol, they are often designed to **look and be served like alcoholic beverages**.

Can minors buy or be served these drinks?

The law mainly focuses on **alcohol content**, but venues also have to consider:

- Community expectations
- How the situation looks to other patrons
- The venue’s reputation and compliance risk

Because zero alcohol drinks often **look like real alcohol**, serving them to minors can create the **impression that the venue is supplying alcohol to underage persons**.

This can lead to:

- Complaints from other patrons
- Reports to licensing authorities
- Inspections or audits
- Damage to the venue’s reputation

For these reasons, many venues choose to **not allow minors to purchase or consume zero alcohol versions of alcoholic-style drinks**.

Why venues take a cautious approach

Even if a drink is technically alcohol-free, problems can arise because:

- Staff from outside the venue (e.g. inspectors) may not immediately know it’s alcohol-free
- Other patrons may assume the venue is serving alcohol to minors
- Photos or social media posts can be misleading
- It can make RSA enforcement harder for staff

To avoid confusion and risk, venues often adopt a **clear house policy**.

What is a house policy?

A house policy is a venue rule that may go beyond the minimum legal requirement to protect:

- Staff
- Patrons
- The licence

For example, a venue policy might state:

“Minors are not permitted to purchase or consume zero alcohol products that resemble alcoholic beverages.”

This helps staff apply the rules **consistently and confidently**.

Your role as staff

As RSA/RSG staff, your job is to follow **venue policy**, even if the product is alcohol-free.

If a minor asks to purchase a zero-alcohol beer, wine or spirit-style drink:

- Politely explain that **venue policy does not allow the sale of these products to minors**
- Offer alternative non-alcoholic options such as:
 - Soft drinks
 - Juice
 - Mocktails that do not imitate specific alcoholic brands
- Stay calm and respectful if questioned

If the situation becomes difficult, involve a **supervisor or manager**.

Key takeaway

Even though some drinks contain no alcohol, the **way they look and are perceived** can create legal and reputational risks for a venue.

By following house policy and being consistent, staff help:

- ✓ Protect the venue’s liquor licence
- ✓ Avoid complaints and penalties
- ✓ Maintain a responsible and professional image

When unsure, always **check with a manager** — you are never expected to handle grey areas alone.